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ABSTRACT

If children's satisfaction in and through books is not diminished by reading instructional practice or lack of reading proficiency, and if the thrust of reading enjoyment adds momentum to the instructional program, it is indeed within the realm of teacher expectation, of possibility and plausibility, that book awards for progress or achievement will be prized by the student winners. A 1928 Horn Book contest for book notes illustrates how important books and reading were then to some young people. The responses of students gathered at the conclusion of a course in Children's Literature document the need for preservice and inservice education to help teachers learn how to help their students to value both the reading and ownership of books. (RS)

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PRIZING BOOKS THROUGH BOOK PRIZES

or

PRIZING BOOK AWARDS COMES BEFORE AWARDING BOOKS AS PRIZES

It is almost sixty years since the following lines appeared in THE HORN BOOK Magazine (May, 1928):

READING CONTEST

Prizes! Prizes! Prizes!

You may enter this contest any time, but the sooner the better, for we are going to give the prizes, which will be books,

To the boy or girl who does the most good reading during the year --- 10 books;

To the boy or girl who sends in the largest number of good book notes on the books read during the year --- 5 books;

To the boy or girl who sends in the best book note during the year --- 1 book.

If you are reading a book now, as soon as you have finished it and while it is still fresh in your mind, write down why it is you liked it or what there is about it that you did not like. You must try to be definite in your reasons. You do not have to write a great deal. You can write a good book note using only one hundred or two hundred words. That is the kind we want. Then mail it

to The Horn Book, 270 Boylston Street, Boston.

Next November, in Children's Book Week, we shall announce who has done the most reading, who has written the greatest number of good book notes, and who has written the very best book note of all.

Here are some of the book notes that have been received. Don't they make you want to enter the contest and perhaps have some of yours printed?...

(Included in sample notes were those on "Winnie-the Pooh" and "Eight Cousins" written by 10 and 12-year old children.)

How clearly the implications surface in these lines! First and probably foremost, is there were indeed young readers to whom the contest had appeal. The announced prizes were obviously valued rewards. Second, the books to be read were obtainable from some source, an assumption evidently more distinctly understood by the 1928 reader. Then, the fundamental inference is drawn. That is, the contest was prepared and offered by those to whom books and reading were important, for those young people whom they sought to encourage in their growing appreciation of books through reading and intimacy with books.

Perhaps in relating these implications to expressed efforts to contribute to the use of children's literature in the reading program, a serious examination of general responses to or consequences of children's independent reading should be made. Although creative teachers encourage children's independent

reading through displays and accountings of reader responses which take many forms through the language arts, (surely there are others who are in need of such guidance) in the final analysis, children's reading becomes an important factor in their educational evaluation and achievement. This fact is learned early in school experience. A reward of a book for reading, to a youngster who associates reading with frustration or failure, may appear as yet another confusing and confused perception of school.

The second implication confirms present efforts to make books available to the students. To this, there is added the availability of the time to spend on not only reading, but examining and selecting and handling books.

The clear intent of those who sponsored The Horn Book contest reflects shared values of book ownership. Valuing books and reading includes pride in book ownership and delight in book sharing. Now sixty years later, there is increasing and continuing observation and discovery relating to the association between children's development of an interest in books and an interest in learning how to read. Perhaps this association is being rediscovered in a new context!

Additionally, other significant suggestions are made in The Horn Book invitation (a) the specification of the number of <u>words</u> eliminates the nature of one's handwriting which may become a factor in using the number of <u>pages</u> as a requirement of length of writing; (b) the contest awards are

separate and distinct and based on the number of books from those based on the number of best book notes, permitting "readers" and "writers" to compete on similar strengths; and (c) the emphasis on seeing one's work in print is an early application of the factor of observed success, from the reader's view, in reading achievement.

Since the teacher is in a singular position to effect and affect perceptions, practices and policies within a range of settings from classroom to community, channels to support enrichment of teacher education through children's literature seem to beg attention. There are teachers who share their own expertise and enthusiasm in a veritable classroom immersion in literature. However, for the many other teachers who are spectators rather than participants, attention to both pre-service and in-service education in the scope of children's literature may be a strategy well worth consideration.

To "document" the recommendation (or plea) for teacher support, the comments of undergraduate and graduate students, submitted at the conclusion of a course in "Children's Literature", are culled from a cumulative, and often redundant file.

(Reflections)

"...when I first walked into this class, I knew absolutely nothing of children's books..."

"...a teacher can make reading fun, something which wasn't done when I went to school..."

"...I guess I was deprived as a child because I feel I missed so much because I never read most of those wonderful children's books...now I started to form my own library..."

"...I enjoyed most reading the books. I hadn't read many books as a small child, and found them very interesting..."

"...I learned about the variety of children's books which I never really thought about before..."

"...I gained insights about authors and books which I had not known or knew very little about..."

"...I loved reading all the children's books..."

(about uses of children's books)

"...I learned how to relate every book and film to something that can be discussed or taught..."

"...biographies and birthdays of authors are a good way for the children to identify with the book's author or the person and the time either or both lived..."

"...I have a better understanding of not only children's literature but the uses of books and all the ideas that can be produced from just one book..."

"...I found out that the movies aren't always exactly like the books..."

(About creative projects)

"...I learned most from bulletin board displays and sharing ideas with other people..."

"...I got a lot of ideas on how to present material and motivate the children to want to read and to enjoy reading..."

"...with a little imagination and thought any topic can be related to any other topic..."

(Perceptions and understandings)

"...children's books are not to be taken for granted..."

"...I realize how important children's literature is and how much it brings into our lives..."

"...most important is to be able to "identify" with children and to see how authors successfully relate to children..."

"...I never realized how important literature is in the classroom and what my teachers were trying to do in elementary school...creativity should be included with literature to make it more appealing..."

"...illustrations and authors...everything about a book is important..."

"...there is literature for everyone..."

"...I realize the importance of education and may become a children's librarian to pass my knowledge on to others who work with children..."

"...this course excited my desire to write and illustrate children's books..."

"...thank you for bringing out the child in me..."

"...in the beginning - there were so many books to read - I never thought I would make it..."

If children's satisfaction in and through books is not diminished by reading instructional practice or lack of reading proficiency, and if the thrust of reading enjoyment adds momentum to the instructional program, it is indeed

within the realm of teacher expectation, of possibility and plausibility, that book awards for progress or achievement will be prized by the student winners.

Perhaps it is indeed our task to "enter this contest (or challenge)" of enriching teaching through intentioned sharing and extended learning and again in the words of The Horn Book Reading Contest..."the sooner the better".

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Reading contest (1928, May). The Horn Book, 4, 44.